

# Fourth Grade Successfully Carries Out NASA Mission



*Mr. Campbell addresses the students before they head out into the reserve.*

For most science teachers, the opportunity to work with NASA would be a dream come true. For **Nick Campbell**, it's now a reality. He was one of only 12 teachers chosen nationwide to participate in this year's Remote Sensing Earth Science Teacher Program (RSESTeP). After learning about the program through a Web site last year, Mr. Campbell proposed his idea for a local RSESTeP mission and, to his surprise, was invited to the Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland this past summer.

"We went through a week of training in regard to remote sensing and became familiar with some of NASA's equipment," says the fourth-grade teacher. "It was all very exciting."

The guidelines for each proposal

stipulated that the teachers' students must be involved and that the study must also help the community in some way. With that in mind, Mr. Campbell proposed to explore and map the proliferation of Brazilian pepper (also known as Florida holly) within the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Reserve, the northernmost point of the Everglades ecosystem.

"Brazilian pepper is an invasive species within the Everglades," explains Mr. Campbell. "That means it's not a native plant and so must be kept in check because

it could drive out other native flora that certain animals and organisms depend upon. In tracking its location and volume, we may now better understand the extent of the threat it poses to other species within the Everglades. Some people may say, 'Brazilian pepper – so what,' but the slightest shift in the delicate ecological balance of a region can have significant unforeseen consequences in relation to the species, both plant and animal, that reside in the area."

As a result, the fourth-grade students had a great time exploring the reserve in January as they carried out a number of experiments within one of Florida's most fascinating environments. The trip was both fun and informative for the more than 90 students who participated as they were able to use GPS devices to track the plant's exact location and conduct other tests using hi-tech equipment sent directly from NASA.

In addition, the students were required to take note of their surroundings in their journals, snap some digital photos of the landscape and wildlife (which included everything from birds and butterflies to snakes and alligators), draw pictures of what they saw, and write a poem inspired by the experience. Some of the reserve's guides and volunteers also chaperoned our students so they could explore the area. The data collected by the fourth graders was shared with NASA with the hope of promoting future conservation efforts within the Everglades ecosystem.



*Teacher Susie Tabor and her students track their location with a GPS device.*



*A fourth grader and one of the guides take water level readings.*